

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

Board of Selectmen
40 Old Farms Road
Willington, CT 06279
(860) 487-3100
(860) 487-3103 Fax
www.willingtonct.org

March 9, 2016

State of Connecticut
Public Safety and Security Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3600
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Testimony of the First Selectman of the Town of Willington REGARDING SB234: AN ACT CONCERNING THE LOCATION OF A FIREARMS TRAINING FACILITY, and also REGARDING SB235: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FIREARMS TRAINING FACILITY

Dear Public Safety and Security Committee,

Thank you again for your leadership on the issue of the siting of the State Police Firing Range and for introducing bills S.B.234 & S.B.235. I appreciated the opportunity to come and testify in support of them.

One of the suggestions I made in my testimony is that I feel it is very important that a facility of this nature needs to be sited in a place where the local community welcomes it. This will make a huge short-term and long-term difference for the State Police and for the host community. Depending on the final design, it is possible there are places in the State of Connecticut where it could go with minimal environmental impact and where the community around it would not see a reduction in property values. Language to the final bill(s) regarding local approval would help protect municipalities and be easy for representatives of communities of all sizes to support.

To be clear, the proposed State Police Firearms Training Facility site **does not have local approval** from the Town of Willington. In fact:

- In June of 2015, the Willington Board of Selectmen unanimously **voted to formally oppose the siting of the facility in our town** during the scoping process and we shared our reasons for opposition with the Department of Administrative Services at that time. (See attached letter)
- On 8/18/15 the Town of Willington appropriated \$100,000 for environmental studies and legal expenses related to the evaluation of the proposed firing range site. **The referendum was historic**, as Senator Guglielmo mentioned at the hearing, because of the turn-out (33.27%), the overwhelming support (82% voted "yes") and the fact that we have never had to have an emergency appropriation of this nature. A \$100,000

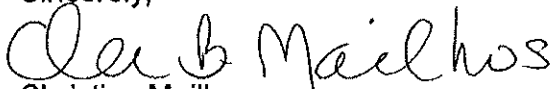
budget for this may not sound like much, especially when the Department of Administrative Services has been asking for \$700,000 to do the Environmental Impact Evaluations for the two sites. However, in Willington, this is a very large appropriation. Please consider that in FY15-16 Willington's total annual budget for legal, (including for labor, land-use and miscellaneous items), is \$32,000.

- **The Selectmen created a State Police Firing Range Steering Committee** comprised of members of the 1) Board of Finance, 2) Planning & Zoning, 3) Conservation Commission, 4) Board of Assessment Appeals, and 5) the citizen's protest group unWillington. This group has been meeting monthly to receive legal advice, make decisions about the Town's next steps and to ensure communication between our boards and citizenry. These boards are all heavily engaged in this process.

We were happy to hear that members of your committee, along with DAS and DESPP, will be visiting the East Haven National Guard facility in the near future. We are encouraged to hear that this idea is being investigated further and hope it is determined that it is worth at least trying. We are all residents of the state and want to see our State Police be able to get the training they deserve as soon as possible.

Thank you for your continued diligence on this topic as a committee and for your individual roles in finding a solution as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,



Christina Mailhos
First Selectman
Town of Willington

cc: Kim Kowalyshyn, Selectman; Town of Willington
John Blessington, Selectman; Town of Willington

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

Board of Selectmen
40 Old Farms Road
Willington, CT 06279
(860) 487-3100
(860) 487-3103 Fax
www.willingtonct.org

June 4, 2015

Mr. Jeff Bolton
Supervision Environmental Analyst
Department of Administrative Services
Division of Construction Services
165 Capitol Avenue, Room 483
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Mr. Bolton,

The citizens of the Town of Willington have great admiration and a tremendous respect for the Connecticut State Police. In fact, many State Troopers live in town and are our friends and neighbors. We know the risks they face in the line of duty and we want them to be well equipped to face all threats. The State Police should have the best training facility possible and we recognize the need for the State Police Firearms Training Facility Relocation project.

However, the "Ruby Site" in Willington is not an appropriate place for a State Police Firearms Training Facility, for all of the valid reasons our residents have been very vocal about. The Willington Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to oppose the State Police Firearms Training Facility being relocated to Willington because we share the concerns of our residents about the impacts such a facility would have on our small, rural town. The Selectmen have empowered me as First Selectman to write to you to implore you to reconsider moving forward with the Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) and eliminate the Ruby Site from consideration.

The Connecticut Environmental Policy Act Manual states, "The purpose of CEPA (Connecticut Environmental Policy Act) is to identify and evaluate the impacts of proposed state actions, which may significantly affect the environment. This evaluation provides the decision maker (a state agency) with information necessary for deciding whether or not to proceed with the project." **It seems to us in Willington that the decision makers have enough information NOW to decide NOT to proceed with the EIE on the parcel in Willington.** Furthermore, had an Initial Environmental Review (IER) been completed prior to the Public Scoping, this site would probably not be under consideration at this time.

It is obvious from first glance that the majority of resource areas to be explored in the EIE will need to be avoided, minimized or mitigated as there are multiple direct and indirect impacts that the proposed facility would have related to: noise, habitats, neighborhoods, traffic and parking, land use, socioeconomic factors, air quality, surface water, wetlands, floodplains, groundwater, historic sites, archaeology, aesthetics,

utilities, hazardous materials, soils, energy use and consistency with the State Conservation and Development Plan.

Please seriously consider...

- The development of this parcel would create a hardship for an abutting property that has a documentable right of access through the proposed site. How can the proposed facility be constructed to avoid, minimize or mitigate this?
- The preliminary criteria of site selection did not include the proximity of residential homes and apartment complexes, yet there are hundreds of people who live within a ½ mile of the proposed site. How can the proposed facility be constructed to avoid, minimize or mitigate this?
- Willington's public elementary school, private preschool, two places of worship, Historic Town Green, Public Library, two Cemeteries, and Town Office Building are approximately 1 mile from the proposed site. In addition to the people in this area, there are many farm animals, domesticated animals and wildlife that will be impacted. How can the proposed facility be constructed to avoid, minimize or mitigate this?
- The proposed site has some of the highest elevations in Willington with many substantial slopes. The proposed facility will certainly require extensive disturbance of virgin ground, habitats and wetlands and the high elevation in general will likely make it difficult to engineer for sound mitigation. How can the proposed facility be constructed to avoid, minimize or mitigate these facts?
- The proposed site has a pristine brook running through the center of it. There is also a high likelihood that there are endangered species living there. How can the proposed facility be constructed to avoid, minimize or mitigate this?
- The proposed site is located in an area of high resource value as designated on Map 16, "Conservation Priority Areas" which is contained in the Natural Resource Inventory and Open Space Conservation Plan - 2007 (NRIOSCP). How can the proposed facility be constructed to avoid, minimize or mitigate this?
- The State of Connecticut must "conserve, improve and protect its natural resources and environment and to control air, land and water pollution in order to enhance the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state." How can the proposed facility be constructed in harmony with CEPA General Statutes, specifically Sec. 22a-1?
- The first sentence of the Town of Willington's Plan of Conservation and Development Vision Statement is, "The Town of Willington is a community that seeks to preserve its rural character and open space and protect its natural,

Mr. Jeffrey Bolton
June 4, 2015
Page 3 of 3

historic and agricultural resources." How can the proposed facility be constructed in harmony with the Town of Willington's Plan of Conservation and Development?

With so many resources to avoid, minimize or mitigate, we hope you agree that it is obvious that the "No Build" option will be the final conclusion of the Environmental Impact Evaluation, or the Initial Environmental Review, which could still be done. An IER was not done prior to the Public Scoping phase, however, the number of issues raised during the Public Scoping phase warrant a cursory review to look at the myriad of issues. We believe that had an Initial Environmental Review (IER) been completed prior to the Public Scoping, this site would have been eliminated from consideration.

Please do the prudent and moral thing and remove the Ruby Site from consideration as soon as possible. Such action would:

- 1) Save our townspeople from unnecessary angst and turmoil;
- 2) Save our Town and the State from the threat of litigation;
- 3) Save the State taxpayers from unnecessary spending (EIE cost is \$100,000+!);
- 4) Protect property values and avoid the negative effect on the real estate market in the coming months;
- 5) Allow the State of Connecticut to move forward with other options in an expeditious manner.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,



Christina Mailhos
First Selectman
Town of Willington

- C: Governor Dannel Malloy
Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman
Benjamin Barnes, Secretary OPM
Dora Schriro, Commissioner, DESPP
Tony Guglielmo, State Senator
Sam Belsito, State Representative
John Blessington, Willington Selectman
Kim Kowalyshyn, Willington Selectman

Town Votes Overwhelmingly To Fight State Police Firearms Facility

Email Facebook 0 Twitter G+ 0

Annie Gentile, Reminder News
12:55 pm, September 1, 2015

On Tuesday, Aug. 18, Willington residents voted overwhelmingly to appropriate \$100,000 to hire legal and environmental professionals to assist the town in evaluating the State Police Firearms Training Facility relocation project on Ruby Road.

The Willington location is one of two sites on a short list from the state police to build a new facility. A second site in East Windsor is also being considered.

The 878 to 194 vote represented a more than 4-to-1 vote in favor of the expenditure.

"I'm very pleased with the results from last night's referendum," said First Selectwoman Christina Mailhos the day after the vote. "Not only did we have a record turnout, but the landslide vote sends a clear message to me and to the leadership of our town about what people want."

She continued, "Mark Branse, our land use attorney, is already on board with helping us. He went through some strategies to help us prepare for the state's environmental impact evaluation, and there are a number of things we can do to prepare to fight if and when the time comes."

Mailhos said that Gov. Dannel P. Malloy has publicly stated that the state is going to continue following the process, and despite calls from both Sen. Tony Guglielmo and Sen. Tim Larson to consider other already state-owned properties, she has not as of yet heard if they are entertaining any other ideas.

"Sen. Guglielmo is not just our local representative, he's a ranking member of the Public Safety Committee, and Sen. Larson, who represents East Windsor, is chairman of the Public Safety Committee," said Mailhos. "It would seem ludicrous that our leaders would not consider their opinions. Let's hope that they are."

In late May, the state police held a scoping meeting at the Willington Library for residents to learn about the proposed facility.

"Everything happened so fast. We were blindsided. We didn't have a clue," said Todd Bissonnette, a member of "UnWillington," a grassroots group of residents which formed in opposition to the facility being built in town.

Bissonnette said the UnWillington name grew out of many discussions residents were having about their unwillingness to allow the state to damage their environment, hurt property values, waste precious tax dollars when suitable state-owned land is readily available, and basically disregard their wishes.

Information about the proposed firearms training facility and UnWillington's efforts to keep it out of Willington can be found at www.unwillington.com.

UnWillington members quickly mobilized and obtained 313 verified signatures from residents, well over the 200 minimum required to ask for a referendum on the issue.

At the Aug. 18 vote at town hall, Bissonnette, who many in town have come to recognize as "The Sign Guy" joined with fellow UnWillington members in setting up an 18-foot trailer covered with opposition signs and a tent set up in front. The group also gave out wristbands and sold UnWillington t-shirts.

"I've made over 800 signs at this point. They're all over town," said Bissonnette, adding that the signs address many of the major concerns of Willington residents -- such as pollution, noise, wasted tax dollars, and opposition to the state building a paramilitary complex in a residential area.

Bissonnette said he also made signs for the organization's July 28 rally at the State Capitol -- signs that read "Why Willington" and signs that personally address Gov. Malloy.

"I was one of 14 people that met with Lt. Gov. Wyman after the rally that day," he said. "She told us to be patient, and that the state is looking at alternate sites as well. She told her our voices are being heard. I hope so."

He added, "At the scoping meeting, we residents of Willington were promised that the state police would not go anywhere they were not wanted. This referendum makes it clearly obvious we don't want a facility here. I ask that they please honor our request and put it where it doesn't bother anyone."

```
<iframe id="51796801e4cb8" name="51796801e4cb8" src="http://mediaservices-d.openxenterprise.com
/afr?aud=406790&cb=0.9701653422927877" frameborder="0" scrolling="no" width="728" height="90"
href="http://mediaservices-d.openxenterprise.com/w/1.0/rc?cs=51796801e4cb8&cb=0.97016534229278
"></a></iframe>
```